

## Academic network for research of food diversity in the Balkans

*Didier Bazile (CIRAD), Dessislava Dimitrova (Slow Food Balkans), and Teodora Ivanova (IBER-BAS)*

After four editions in Sofia (2010, 2012), Dubrovnik (2014) and Tirana (2016), Terra Madre Balkans (TMB) network has gathered at the heart of the European debate in a moment that is crucial for the definition of the Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) beyond 2020.

The knowledge about common history, rich biodiversity and natural resources together with the similar socio-economic challenges experiences in the region make it possible to transform the CAP into a toolbox, responding to the regional context.

TMB2018 is a strategic tool to raise that the European integration of the Western Balkans needs a holistic approach in order to ensure the peace, security and prosperity of this diverse region. In line with improving the region's connectivity, considering human dimension of agricultural biodiversity demonstrates the potential of small-scale food producers and rural communities from the Balkans to be the driving force for fostering local growth and socio-economic development.

Slow Food conducted a recent survey of 10.000 small-scale farmers from across the EU with the aim to contribute to the debate of the future CAP. It emerged the need to integrate policy processes affecting food systems to achieve a transition to diversified agroecological systems based on agrobiodiversity, lower dependency on external inputs, social relationships and short supply chains.

Food reflects the skills of local communities to survive at specific local conditions utilizing the available resources - rich food heritage and food-related biodiversity. Results of the ESSEDRA project can describe 174 products from the Ark of Taste with plant component with a bigger diversity and deeper connection with territories. They were classified in 17 Categories across the 9 Countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Turkey, Montenegro). It helps to design and to promote specific models of the Ark of Taste products by category and by country, with Identifying common threats.

An academic research network can be developed with the aim:

- To explore the potential of the network of territories, running activities and relevant stakeholders in the Balkans, to study and valorize the wild and crop plant genetic resources as a source for balanced and socially responsible territorial development.
- To develop the methodology for testing this model first in Bulgaria and to discuss tools and approaches for its multiplication at the Balkan level through the concept of Farmers' Schools.

Coordinating activities and sharing knowledge and approaches is essential for many topics that are transnationals and, needs more alignment in research across countries:

- Sustainable Use of PGRFA, with a special attention to traditional varieties and NUS; Seed Savers Farms and Network of Heritage Exchange; Linking Seed Diversity & Food Diversity; Landscape and territorial approaches; Participatory Guarantee System, Participatory Labelling & Collective Brands; Agroecology.

Cooperation in Mediterranean research, with this example of an Academic network for research of food diversity in the Balkans, could be a major driver to cooperation in the Balkans with other Mediterranean countries, for EU integration and better prosperity of rural areas.